

Influence of social and religious factors in Polish Sejm elections, 2001–2007

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Abstract. The analysis presented herein addresses the issue of social and religious diversity within the Catholic Church and its influence on voter turnout and Sejm election results in Poland. The paper covers election results from 2001 to 2007. Both organizational-institutional characteristics and social-religious characteristics of the Church have been taken into account when assessing the impact of the Church on regional differences in political support for selected political factions in 2005. The impact of each factor on the support level for a given party or political orientation in a regional (spatial) context was assessed on the basis of the degree of coincidence of the factors of interest, measured using the coefficient of correlation.

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Contents:

1. Introduction	8
2. Sources of data and research difficulties	8
3. Analysis of influence of religion on electoral preferences and behaviors in light of the literature of the field	9
4. Nature of the Catholic Church in Poland at the turn of the 21 st century and its influence on the election process	9
5. Regional differences in voter turnout	12
6. Regional differences in election results	13
6.1. Changes on the political scene	13
6.2. Election results	14
6.3. Analysis of regional variability in party support	16
7. Conclusions	19

Note.....	20
References	20

1. Introduction

Religious and social divisions in Western Europe were key factors used to help explain electoral behavior in that part of the world until the late 1970s. As Western European societies started to become more secular and correspondingly less religiously active, religious factors became increasingly less important in the electoral behavior of their citizens.

Following the collapse of the communist system in Eastern Europe, it turned out that, despite years of persecution and limitations on Church activity, Poland was still a country with a substantial percentage of Catholic citizens, compared to other post-socialist countries. It became clear that the Church continues to play an important role in the social and political life of the Polish nation.

The purpose of this paper is to show regional differences in voter turnout and election results with respect to major political parties taking part in elections in 2001, 2005, and 2007, as well as the influence of social and religious factors on regional differences in electoral behavior.

2. Sources of data and research difficulties

The analysis of the influence of the social and religious characteristics of the Roman Catholic faithful on regional differences in voter turnout and Sejm election results required data collected by two institutions. Official election results are gathered by the National Election Commission (Polish acronym: PKW) from data pools provided by district election commissions. However, election data analysis is also performed based on smaller units that comprise election districts: townships (*gminy*), counties (*poviats*), and provinces (*voivodeships*). Data on the Catholic Church in Poland (e.g. number of Catholics in dioceses, number of parishes, number of priests, attendance at Sunday Mass, and the re-

ceiving of Holy Communion) are gathered by the Statistical Institute of the Catholic Church (Polish acronym: ISKK).

Ecclesiastical administration territories do not coincide with local-level administrative boundaries. Many dioceses lie on the boundary of two or more national provinces. Diocesan boundaries cross the boundaries of counties, municipalities, and provinces. Therefore, Sejm election results were generated for 41 dioceses in order to compare regional turnout rates as well as election results with respect to the social and religious characteristics of the Roman Catholic Church. A number of difficulties were encountered in the course of the research work. For example, territorial and administrative changes, which included the creation of two new dioceses in 2004 (Bydgoszcz, Świdnica). In order to produce comparable results for the research period of interest, 2001 data were converted based on 2004 diocesan boundaries. Votes cast abroad were not included in the election data collection process.

Another problem encountered during the research process was somewhat questionable statistical information (area, population data) on dioceses published by the Central Statistical Office of Poland (Polish acronym: GUS) and the ISKK research organization. Data on social, religious, and organizational characteristics of dioceses were difficult to verify, but were still considered credible, although new diocesan area and population data had to be calculated. These calculations were based on official data on the population and area of the country.

Many political factions and community organizations took part in the Sejm elections of 2001, 2005, and 2007. In order to show pertinent relationships and changes on the political scene, the paper looks at support levels for parties (across dioceses) that garnered the most votes as well as those that were significant enough to be mentioned. The following parties were taken into account: Democratic Left Alliance (SLD), Polish Socialist Party (PPS), Polish Social Democracy (SdPI), the Left and the Demo-

crats (LiD), Polish Peasants' Party (PSL), Solidarity Electoral Action (AWS), Civic Platform (PO), Law and Justice (PiS), Freedom Union (UW), League of Polish Families (LPR), and the Self Defense Party. Once again, the acronyms above are those used by respective political parties in Poland.

3. Analysis of influence of religion on electoral preferences and behaviors in light of the literature of the field

Electoral geography has been absent from Polish research studies since the mid-1940s. The political situation in Poland at the time was the reason behind this state of affairs. Following the democratic changes that took place in the early 1990s and the first free elections in postwar Poland, research in this field became possible once again.

The scope of electoral geography research performed in Poland differs substantially from that in Western Europe and the United States (Sobczyński, 2003). Polish election research does not consider race to be a factor and social status is treated as being marginally important. In light of the social and historical differences between the West and Poland, when Polish election geographers adopt research models from the West, they do so with special modifications that make the models applicable to Polish society and economics (Matykowski, et al., 1995; Matykowski, 2007). This is especially true of data acquisition methods. The issues that force changes in Western models being applied in Poland include the fact that Poland used to be a centrally planned economy until the late 1980s and has also developed different spatial patterns and historical precedents (Kowalski, 2003).

Electoral behavior research in Poland is focused on the influence of historical factors such as the legacy of the political partitions between Russia, Prussia, and Austria in the late 18th century, political boundary changes following World War II, and selected urban-rural issues. Religious factors are rarely taken into account. Some publications do exist that touch on this issue, including: Ingram and Newell (1997), Raciborski (1997), Zarycki (1997), Ka-Lok Chan (2000), Kowalski (2000), Zarycki (2000), Zarycki and Nowak (2000), Jasiewicz (2002), Grabowska (2002) and Zarycki (2007).

Despite the growing secularization of societies around the world, the religion factor remains important in the analysis of electoral behavior both in Europe and countries such as the United States, Canada, and Australia. A number of publications address this very issue: Broughton and Napel (2000), Campbell (2007), van der Eijk and Niemöller (1987), Evans and Tonge (2007), Green (2007), Haerpfer and Gehmacher (1984), Roy and Wallace (2007).

4. Nature of the Catholic Church in Poland at the turn of the 21st century and its influence on the election process

Poland is the only country in post-communist Europe with a very high percentage of religious individuals. In 1991, 93.9% of the Polish population declared its allegiance to the Roman Catholic Church, while 3.2% were of other faiths. Only 2.9% of the population claimed no affiliation with organized religion. This type of religious profile is characteristic of religiously homogeneous states (Bilśka-Wodecka, 2005). The last two decades of social and political transformation in Poland have resulted in a degree of differentiation and personalization of religion. This trend has been reflected in changes in the denominational profile of Poland. The number of Catholics has started to gradually decrease to 89.6% in 2005. Other churches and religious communities have experienced little change in terms of membership. On the other hand, the number of people claiming no religious affiliation has grown considerably between 1991 and 2005. In 2005, 8.0% of the Polish population claimed no affiliation with organized religion.

The distribution of the Catholic population across Poland is primarily the product of historical and political determinants (Bilśka-Wodecka, 2005) as well as social issues that have emerged towards the end of the 20th century. Catholics were clearly dominant in dioceses located in central Poland (former Kingdom of Poland) and southern Poland (former Galicia) until the early 1990s. The three exceptions to this rule were the Białystok Diocese (68.2%), Drohiczyn Diocese (71.9%), and Bielsko-Żywiec Diocese (88.4%). Large numbers of Orthodox Christians live in the first two dioceses.

es, while the third diocese is inhabited by a sizeable population of Lutherans. In western Poland, the number of Catholics was smaller than would be expected compared with before 1990 because of slowly increasing secularization, a trend somewhat common among Catholics resettled to the area from

central and eastern Poland following World War II. The Zielona Góra-Gorzów Diocese, Szczecin-Kamień Diocese, and Koszalin-Kołobrzeg Diocese all had seen an influx of Greek Catholic Lemkos in 1947 following “Operation Vistula”, a case of forced resettlement (Fig. 1A).

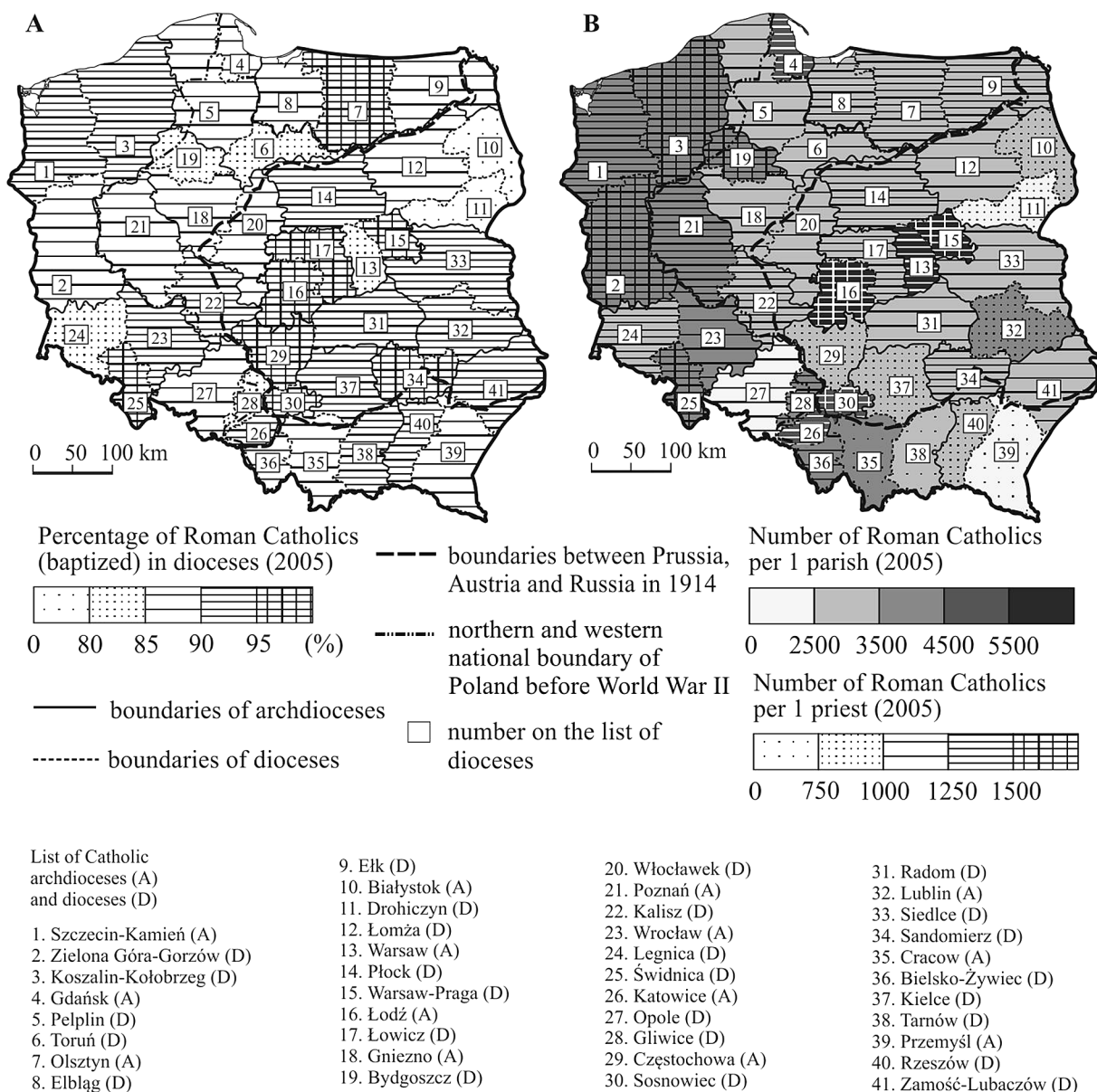


Fig. 1. Distribution of Roman Catholics in Poland according to dioceses (A) and number of faithful per parish and per priest (B) in 2005

Source: Authors' own work, based on data from Zdaniewicz and Adamczuk (2000–2007)

In the Catholic Church, the parish is the fundamental unit of religious life. 'In Polish society, the Roman Catholic parish is not only a religious institution (...) but also an important social institution that affects a broad range of local social issues' (Firlit, 2000: 107). The parish is an important local center of social integration. In 2005, there were 10,016 Catholic parishes in Poland, staffed by 29,040 priests.

The best developed network of parishes can be found in Catholic dioceses located in southeastern

Poland (Tarnów, Rzeszów, Przemyśl, Kraków). This part of Poland is also a region with a large number of priests per parish (Fig. 1B). A small number of faithful per parish and per priest has a meaningful impact on the quality of religious life in a given area. The proof is the following – areas characterized by a well-developed network of parishes are also areas where the largest numbers of faithful attend Sunday Mass (*dominicanes*) and receive Holy Communion (*communicantes*) (Fig. 2).

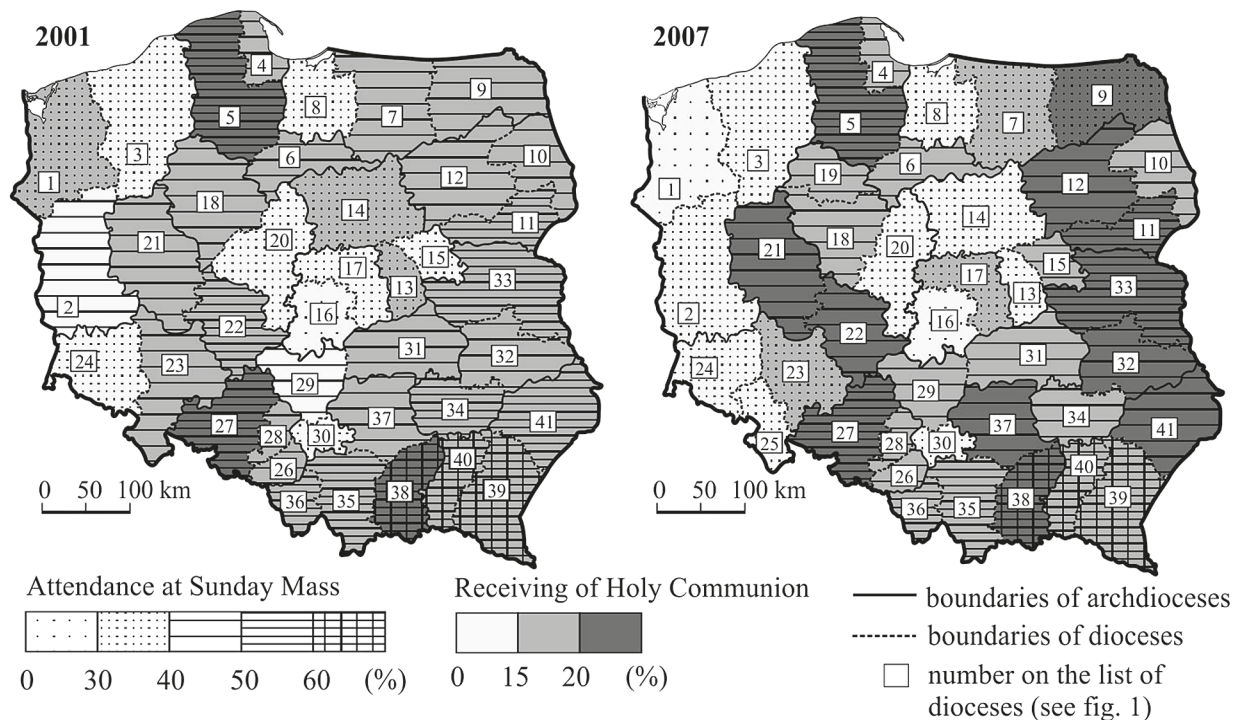


Fig. 2. Sunday religious practices in 2001, 2005, and 2007. Attendance at Sunday Mass (*dominicanes*) and the receiving of Holy Communion (*communicantes*)

Source: Authors' own work, based on data from Zdaniewicz and Adamczuk (2000–2007)

In Poland, the abandonment of religious practices is almost synonymous with a weakening of the faith that eventually leads to its loss. Consistent participation in religious practices is associated with trust in the Church and a religious disposition that manifests itself in a certain type of lifestyle. Practicing Catholics, more often than non-practicing Catholics, value family ties, accept traditional roles of women, value public order and the common good, and lean towards right-wing political parties (Mariański, 2000).

Research has shown that participation in Sunday Mass has been in steady decline from 51.0% in 1980 to 44.2% in 2007. Levels of piety have increased cyclically following important events in the last two decades of Polish history. W. Piwowarski believes that piety will continue to decrease on a national level. This decline is associated with weakening political and patriotic factors that have historically driven and revived national piety (Mariański, 2000). The decline in repetitious religious practices may be associated with a growing cognitive-affective disso-

nance. The values that the Church stands for are not recognized as important by young people who continue to abandon traditional values (Mariański, 2000).

The last 19 years have seen a trend of diversification and privatization of religion in Polish society. More and more people are not afraid to declare and manifest their beliefs even if they are other than Catholic. This is especially true of people who declare themselves to be non-believers. One of the symptoms of the gradual secularization of Polish society may be its changed attitudes towards the moral authority of the Church (Bilska-Wodecka, 2006).

The Catholic Church's involvement in the formation of a democratic state is nothing new. The Church was one of the co-founders of the political system of the post-1989 Third Polish Republic. However, long before this, the Church always took an active part in the political life of the nation. 61.3% of surveyed individuals have said that the political transformation of Poland in the late 1980s would not have been possible without the help of the Catholic Church (Ochocki, 2004).

The Catholic Church and other denominations injected weakness and instability into the political system, thus affecting election results. Many Catholic priests played an active role in all elections by promoting certain parties and candidates as well as by helping to inspire the formation of electoral coalitions (Raciborski, 1997; Markowski, 2006). This state of affairs has remained in place since the first free elections in 1989. At that time, the Catholic Church made its first concerted effort to influence an election by creating grassroots support for candidates put forth by the 'Solidarność' Citizens' Committee.

Some representatives of the Church hierarchy have made attempts to ensure that only individuals who respect Christian values and accept the Church's social teaching could be elected to the Sejm. In their view, a candidate's religion should be an issue in the election process. However, election results have shown that this recommendation is not being followed and elections are being won by parties that do not have a positive view of the Church's involvement in public life. Opinion surveys and election results have shown that economic and social issues are more important than religious issues (Wybory 2001, 2001).

5. Regional differences in voter turnout

Voter turnout is a barometer that measures social moods and serves as a key gauge for a democratic system. Low voter turnout is not only a problem in the sense of representative bodies being not very representative but also reflects a low level of acceptance of ongoing changes (Pankowski, 2001). This hypothesis is quite valid in the case of Poland. The main factors that affect low turnout include: (a) consequences of an unfinished political and economic transformation — an unstable political system, (b) changes in social structure such as poverty, social exclusion, and a high rate of unemployment, (c) weaknesses in election law leading to the fragmentation of the political scene and the weakening of the Sejm's legislative power, (d) political crisis manifested by a growing number of political and corruption scandals as well as a growing number of parliamentary investigation commissions (Sejm commissions), (e) growing disenchantment with the results of frequent elections and a gradually encroaching indifference to who is in charge of government (Kik, 2007).

According to Cześnik (2007), individuals who vote often and those who vote sometimes differ in terms of education, age, and adherence to religious practices. Individuals who are believers and practice their faith declare to be more willing to participate in Sejm elections than do individuals who are not practicing (Wybory 2001, 2001).

Eligible voter turnout in Poland fluctuated from 43.2% in 1991 to 53.9% in 2007. These numbers are quite low compared to other European countries. The highest rates of voter turnout are found in Western democracies — with the exception of Great Britain — where the turnout rate is about 77%. Even some of the other post-socialist states (e.g. Czech Republic, Slovakia, Latvia) in 1991–2005 had substantially higher voter turnout rates (more than 60%) than that in Poland (Markowski, 2006; Kik, 2007).

One of the macro-regions with a relatively high voter turnout rate in the 1990s was southeastern Poland. Civic and political behaviors in this part of Poland were shaped by Austro-Hungarian rule in the late 19th century (Florczyk et al., 1989; Kowalski, 2003). The civic traditions formed at that time

were passed on from generation to generation and became embedded in the civic traditions of this part of post-1918 Poland. Similar types of civic models came to be accepted by the population of those parts of Poland occupied by Prussia in the 19th century. As Poland regained its independence in 1918 and its various constituent parts came under Polish rule, certain types of acquired civic behaviors remained. In 1945, under the Treaty of Potsdam, Poland annexed large parts of eastern Germany, which became known as the Recovered Lands within the postwar Polish state. These lands were designed to offset land annexed by the Soviet Union (eastern Poland) and de facto served as war reparations from the new non-Nazi German states of West Germany and East Germany. The new Polish-German boundary was formally recognized by the West German government in 1970.

Four regions have been identified in Poland as having had a different historical past as well as different social, economic, and cultural underpinnings (Kowalski 2000, 2003). The four regions are: (a) former Russian partition (Congress Kingdom and Białystok Region), (b) former Austrian partition (Galicia, Cieszyn Silesia), (c) former Prussian partition (lands assigned to Poland by the Treaty of Versailles), and (d) lands assigned to Poland by the Treaty of Potsdam.

6. Regional differences in election results

6.1. Changes on the political scene

The Polish political scene began to change during the democratic transformation process that began in 1989. As many as 111 parties and community organizations took part in the 1991 election to the Sejm. The early elections that followed in 1993 attracted 35 political parties and organizations known in Poland as election committees (1). The next election cycle took place after a full 4-year term in 1997 with 21 election committees taking part. The following two elections in 2001 and 2005 drew 14 and 22 election committees, respectively. Another early election took place in 2007, but drew only 10 election committees. Changes on the political scene were also associated with the instability of election law (Markowski, 2006). The vote-to-mandate

conversion method has been modified four times since 1989.

A dynamically changing number of election committees can make it difficult to understand the Polish political scene, which has undergone numerous changes during the last 25 years of the system transformation process. The first group of Polish political parties is made up of parties that existed during the communist era and later underwent a major metamorphosis following the election of the first government with a non-communist prime minister in August of 1989. In light of their existence prior to 1989, they are called old-line parties. These include the non-Marxist Social Democratic Party of the Republic of Poland that evolved from the Communist Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR) in January of 1990. The party evolved once again in 1999 to become the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD). Another party, the United People's Party (ZSL), was renamed the Polish Peasants' Party (PSL) in May of 1990.

The "Solidarity" Movement went into the 1989 election as a unified voting bloc. Once in power, the Movement began to slowly disintegrate and metamorphose into many different political entities. Two new parties emerged in the spring of 2001: Civic Platform (PO) and Law and Justice (PiS). Prior to the election of 2001 — in May — a new party emerged with a nationalist-Catholic orientation called the League of Polish Families (LPR), an organization without roots in the Solidarity Movement.

Another party that came onto the political scene in 2001 was the Self Defense Party, a party that had been on the margins of Polish politics in the elections of 1991, 1993, and 1997. The Sejm elections of 2001 were dominated by a coalition of the SLD and the Labor Union parties. SLD emerged in April, 1999 as the new party of the left wing. The Labor Union party had taken part in the previous election cycle on its own, but did not receive more than 5% of the vote. The two new parties, PO and PiS, also gained seats in the Sejm, as did the PSL old-line party. The two parties that had strongly questioned the effects of the post-1989 economic transformation, LPR and the Self Defense Party, also did gain seats. The parties that had previously been part of the Electoral Action of the Right altogether received no more than 8% of the vote. Finally, the Freedom Union Party garnered a mere 5% of the vote.

The SLD coalition fell apart in March of 2004. The breakup led to the formation of yet another left-wing party called the Polish Social Democracy Party (Polish acronym: SdPI), which produced its own list of candidates in the 2005 elections. The Freedom Union Party, which had lost the 2001 elections, attempted to salvage its position on the Polish political scene by coupling with a faction of disenchanted post-communist activists to form the Democratic Party. The combined political entity received less than 5% of the vote in the Sejm elections of 2005. The parties that had won seats in the Sejm in the previous term (2001–2005) remained dominant. In 2007, the Democratic Party (PD) joined an alliance of left-wing parties (SLD, SdPI) to form a new political organization called the Left and the Democrats (LiD). The alliance dissolved shortly after the 2007 elections.

6.2. Election results

In the Sejm elections of 2001, the strongest support on the national scale was garnered by a coalition of left-wing parties (SLD and UP) (Table 1, Fig. 3). The coalition gained the strongest political support in the following dioceses: Sosnowiec (61.8%), Legnica (53.7%). The dioceses above are located in western Poland and in the former Russian partition — Sosnowiec being an opposite of two other dioceses in Upper Silesia (Katowice and Gliwice). Gniezno and Bydgoszcz, on the other hand, are located in the former Prussian partition. The SLD-UP coalition received its weakest support from voters in southeastern dioceses: former Galicia — Przemyśl (30.0%), Rzeszów (29.8%), Kraków (29.6%); and Łomża (28.3%) in eastern Poland.

Table 1. Support levels for different political orientations in elections from 2001 to 2007

Political orientation	Parties with an established political orientation	Number of voters (in thousands)	Percentage of eligible voters	Percentage of voters relative to valid votes	Number of mandates in the Sejm
2001 Election					
left-wing parties	SLD-UP	5,342,519	18.19	41.04	216
	PPS	13,459	0.05	0.17	–
Christian right-wing parties	PiS	1,236,787	4.21	9.50	44
	LPR	1,025,148	3.49	7.87	38
	AWS (coalition)	729,207	2.48	5.60	–
pro-rural parties	PSL	1,168,659	3.98	8.98	42
	Self Defense Party	1,327,624	4.52	10.20	53
pro-urban parties	PO	1,651,099	5.62	12.68	65
	UW	404,074	1.38	3.10	–
2005 Election					
left-wing parties	SLD	1,335,257	4.42	11.31	55
	Polish Social Democracy	459,380	0.15	3.89	–
Christian right-wing parties	PiS	3,185,714	10.54	26.99	155
	LPR	940,762	3.11	7.97	34
	Patriotic Movement	124,038	0.41	1.05	–
	Center Party	21,893	0.07	0.19	–
pro-rural parties	PSL	821,656	2.72	6.96	25
	Self Defense Party	1,347,355	4.46	11.41	56
pro-urban parties	PO	2,849,259	9.43	24.14	133
	Democratic Party	289,276	0.96	2.45	–
2007 Election					
left-wing parties	Lid	2,122,981	6.93	13.15	53
Christian right-wing parties	PiS	5,183,477	16.93	32.11	166
	LPR	209,171	0.68	1.30	–
pro-rural parties	PSL	1,437,638	4.70	8.91	31
	Self Defense Party	247,335	0.81	1.53	–
pro-urban parties	PO	6,701,010	21.89	41.51	209

Note: – a given party had no representatives in the Sejm

Source: Authors' own work, based on Wybory Sejm/Senat (2007)

The Sejm elections of 2005 brought about another change on the national political scene. PO and PiS, the two post-Solidarity parties, won the elections. The Self Defense Party and SLD also received strong support in some regions (Table 1, Fig. 3).

PO enjoyed the strongest support in the following dioceses: Gdańsk (42.6%), Gliwice (33.6%). PO voters are religious moderates who enjoy a strong-

er position in the job market (more management jobs), which translates into higher earnings and an overall better financial situation. PO voters identify themselves as middle and upper class and live in urban areas (Markowski 2006). They are generally younger people with a higher education. The main PO strongholds are large cities, western Poland, and northern Poland.

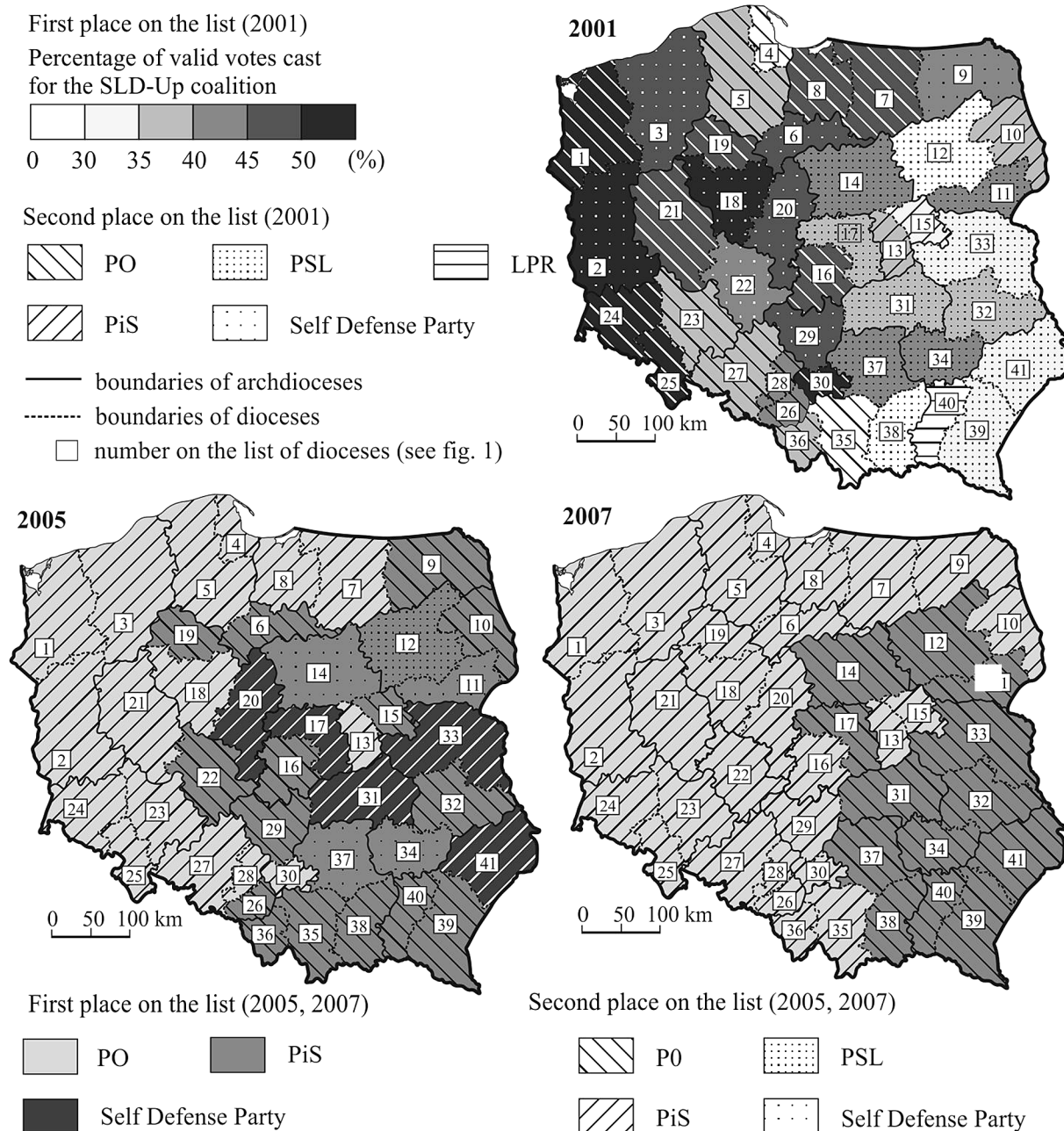


Fig. 3. Support for the SLD-UP coalition (2001), as well as PO and PiS (2005, 2007)

Source: Authors' own work

PiS received the strongest support in the Rzeszów Diocese (41.1%), Tarnów Diocese (38.0%), and Bielsko-Żywiec Diocese (35.8%). PiS voters are more religious and hold a less attractive position in the job market, which results in a less attractive financial situation. PiS voters generally do not identify themselves as middle class or upper class, live in rural areas, tend to be older, and lack a higher education (Markowski, 2006). PiS voters tend to be Euro-sceptics who also tend to be wary of former Communists holding political positions. Finally, this group of voters does not support privatization and does not mind when the Catholic Church interferes in politics (Markowski, 2006).

While PO won the early election of 2007 (Tab. 1, Fig. 3), PiS remains a major opposition party. The distribution of political support for the two parties remains similar to that in 2005. The only exception are dioceses in central and southern Poland where support for PiS has grown to some extent.

6.3. Analysis of regional variability in party support

The analysis of variability in regional support for particular parties is one of the key research problems in electoral geography. The Polish political scene has undergone so many metamorphoses since 1989 that temporal comparative analysis is a rather difficult task. Another difficulty is frequently low voter turnout in Polish Sejm elections. Declining turnout rates are yet another problem. In order to be able to compare support for particular parties, the research included the percentage of voters supporting a given party with respect to the total number of voters in a given election district (an intensity index). This, of course, was done in addition to the use of the traditional percentage of voters supporting a given party with respect to the total number of valid votes cast in a given election district (a structural index).

In addition to providing a description of differences from one diocese to another, the paper makes an attempt to identify the key factors that affect these differences on a macro-structural level. Factors are properties that help determine other properties of a given entity and can be used to classify and/or create order (Chojnicki, Czyż, 1978). The impact of a defined factor on the level of sup-

port for a party or political orientation in a regional (spatial) context can be assessed based on the degree of coincidence of the characteristics of interest, as measured using the coefficient of correlation. The factors that shape regional differences in support for political parties include: (a) endogenic factors — intrinsic elements of the electoral system, (b) exogenic factors — issues that result from the unique social and economic characteristics of a regional system. In this case, this is a reference to social and religious characteristics.

A number of exogenic factors that shape regional differences in support for particular political groups were used in the research process. These include indices that characterize the organizational, institutional, social, and religious dimensions of the Catholic Church in 2005: (a) average number of Catholics in a parish (in thousands), (b) Catholic population density in a diocese — the number of Catholics per square kilometer, (c) average number of faithful per priest, (d) percentage of Catholics with respect to the total population in a diocese, (e) percentage of *dominantes* or faithful who attend Sunday Mass, (f) percentage of *communicantes* or faithful who receive Holy Communion, (g) number of seminarians per 100,000 Catholics — a measure of vocations to the priesthood in a diocese, (h) number of nuns and monks per 100,000 Catholics (Table 2).

Coefficients of correlation were determined for the given set of social, religious, organizational, and institutional characteristics of the Roman Catholic Church in Poland and the level of support (percentage of valid votes) provided to the major political parties in consecutive elections to the Sejm (2001, 2005, 2007). The *dominantes* index and the *communicantes* index are used to describe the level of religiousness of Catholics. Differences in the percentage of *dominantes* were meaningfully correlated (significance level: $\alpha=0.01$) with changes in political support for left-wing parties: SLD-UP coalition in 2001, SLD and Polish Social Democracy in 2005, and LiD in 2007. In the 2005 and 2007 elections, meaningful correlations have been identified between the percentage of *dominantes* and political support for pro-urban centrist-liberal parties: Democratic Party in 2005, PO in 2007. Positive correlations have been identified between the percentage of *dominantes* and political support for

Christian right-wing parties: LPR (all three elections), AWS (2001), PiS (2005, 2007). In summary, dioceses with a higher percentage of individuals

attending Sunday Mass provided less political support to left-wing parties and more support to right-wing parties.

Table 2. Influence of social and religious characteristics on support for selected political parties

Social-religious characteristic	Coefficient of correlation ^a between support for a given party and social and religious characteristics for the following years		
	2001	2005	2007
Positive correlation	Percentage of <i>dominicanos</i>	AWS (0.614), LPR (0.684)	PiS (0.631) LPR (0.477)
	Percentage of <i>communicantes</i>	LPR (0.384)	LPR (0.348) LPR (0.360)
	Average number of Catholics per priest	SLD-UP (0.670)	SLD (0.613) DP ^b (0.463), SdPI (0.571)
	Average number of Catholics in parish	UW (0.568), PiS (0.636), PO (0.469)	DP (0.560), SdPI (0.505), PO (0.527)
	Number of Catholics per km ²	UW (0.526), PiS (0.552), PO (0.542)	PiS (0.432) PO (0.592)
	Percentage of urban population	SLD-UP (0.414), UW (0.740), PiS (0.489), PO (0.571)	PO (0.813), LiD (0.344) PO (0.779)
Negative correlation	Percentage of <i>dominicanos</i>	SLD-UP (-0.684)	DP (-0.521), SdPI (-0.642), SLD (-0.625)
	Percentage of <i>communicantes</i>	SLD-UP (-0.553)	DP (-0.317), SdPI (-0.483), SLD (-0.498)
	Average number of Catholics per priest	PSL (-0.462), LPR (-0.624)	LPR (-0.553), PiS (-0.582)
	Average number of Catholics in parish	SDP (-0.564), PSL (-0.492)	SDP (-0.517), PSL -0.527)
	Number of Catholics per km ²	SDP (-0.705), PSL (-0.501)	SDP (-0.688), PSL (-0.563)
	Percentage of urban population	SDP (-0.720), PSL (-0.842), LPR (-0.438)	SDP (-0.621), PSL (-0.821), LPR (-0.517) PiS (-0.578)

Notes: ^a Pearson's coefficient of correlation — statistically significant at the $\alpha=0.01$ level, ($|r| \geq 0.398$); ^b DP – Democratic Party; ^c SDP – Self Defense Party

Source: Authors' own work

It is important to note that support for left-wing parties was negatively correlated with the second characteristic of the religious state of the Polish faithful — the percentage of *communicantes*. A statistically significant coefficient of correlation was determined for the relationship between the per-

centage of *communicantes* and support for SLD-UP in 2001, support for Polish Social Democracy in 2005, and LiD in 2007. Once again, dioceses with lower levels of religious behavior generally provided more support to at least some left-wing parties.

Organizational characteristics of the Roman Catholic Church also do affect the level of support for some political parties. On average, dioceses with smaller parishes (number of faithful) provided more political support to pro-rural parties (PSL, Self Defense Party) in all three elections. On the other hand, dioceses with larger than average parishes provided more political support to PO in all three elections, UW in 2001 and its relative, the Democratic Party in 2005, Polish Social Democracy in 2005, and PiS (first elections only in 2001).

Dioceses with lower numbers of faithful per priest tended to provide more support to parties such as LPR. A low faithful-to-priest ratio favors more parishioner-priest interactions. A similar type of relationship between the number of faithful per priest and support for PSL was observed in 2001. The same was true for PiS in 2007.

In order to produce a comprehensive picture of the distribution of support for groups of parties with a similar orientation (defined with respect to the total number of eligible voters in a diocese), principal component analysis was used based on a correlation matrix (2001, 2005, 2007). The analysis included: (a) support levels for left-wing parties in three consecutive elections, (b) support levels for Christian right-wing parties in three consecutive elections, (c) support levels for pro-rural parties in three consecutive elections, (d) support levels for pro-urban parties in three consecutive elections (Table 2, Fig. 4). Hence, the observation matrix consisted of 41 dioceses versus 12 characteristics. A transformation of the characteristics into principal components led to the generation of the first component, which explained 49.97% of the variability in the original characteristics.

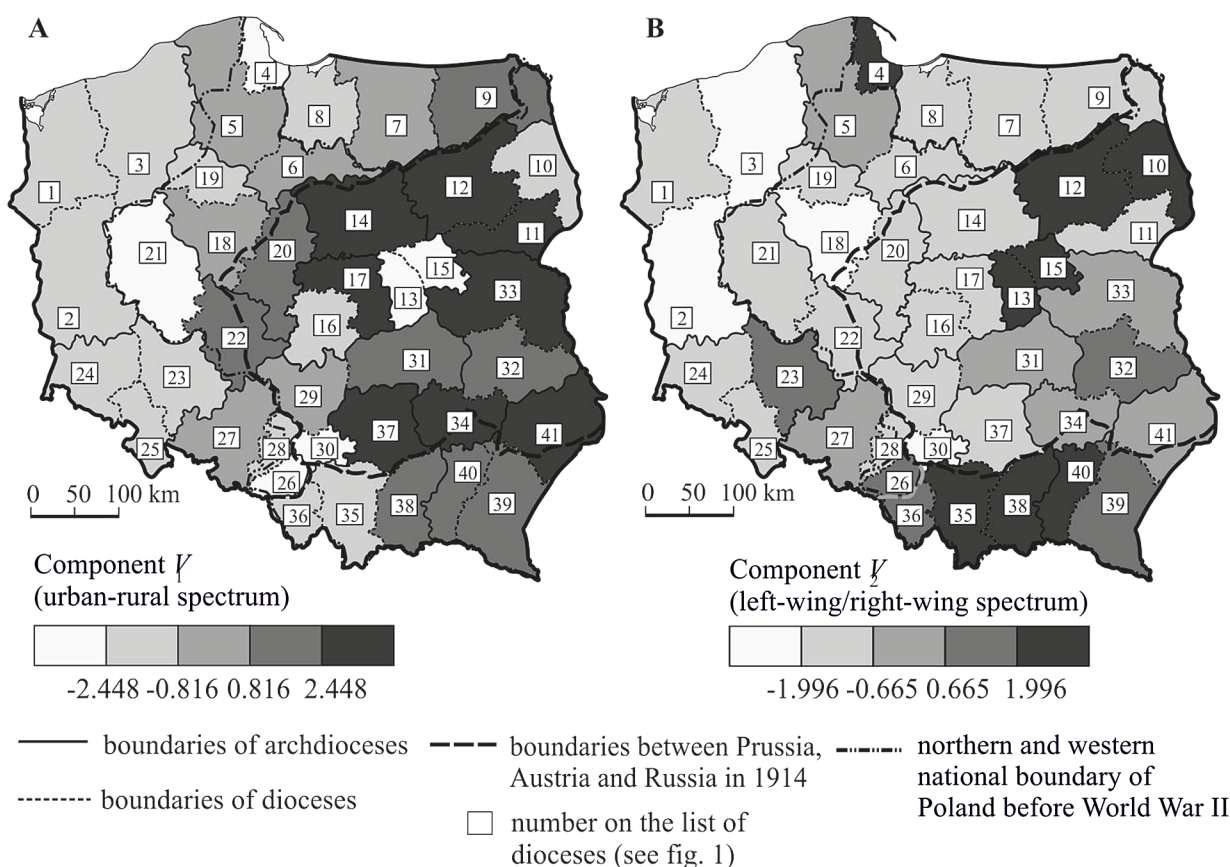


Fig. 4. Values of the V_1 (A) and V_2 (B) principal components

Source: Authors' own work

The first principal component (V_1) possessed statistically significant correlations ($\alpha = 0.01$) with most of the characteristics analyzed: (a) support for pro-rural parties in 2001 ($r = 0.943$), (b) support for pro-rural parties in 2005 ($r = 0.918$), (c) support for pro-rural parties in 2007 ($r = 0.904$), (d) support for the Civic Platform (a pro-urban party) in 2007 ($r = -0.959$), (e) support for pro-urban parties in 2005 ($r = -0.892$), (f) support for pro-urban parties in 2001 ($r = -0.781$), (g) support for left-wing parties in 2005 ($r = -0.647$), (h) support for the LiD coalition in 2007 ($r = -0.590$), and (i) support for left-wing parties in 2001 ($r = -0.467$).

This component can be interpreted as the component of urban-rural conflict among voters (Fig. 4A). The lowest values of V_1 (indicative of an urban population) have been determined for the following dioceses: Gdańsk (-4.92), Warsaw (-4.42), Sosnowiec (-3.43), Warsaw-Praga (-2.62), Katowice (-2.54), Poznań (-2.51). The highest values of V_1 have been determined for dioceses in eastern and central Poland: Zamość-Lubaczów (4.92), Siedlce (4.40), Łomża (4.16), Łowicz (3.28), Płock (3.25).

Social and religious factors that correlate well with the regional distribution of the principal component V_1 (urban-rural spectrum) include the urbanization level of dioceses ($r = -0.885$) and the following three geographic characteristics of the Catholic Church: (a) average number of Catholics in a parish ($r = -0.633$), (b) number of Catholics per square kilometer ($r = -0.604$), (c) number of Catholics per priest ($r = -0.482$). This indicates that Catholic parishes in primarily urban dioceses tend to be larger, have more parishioners per priest, and a high Catholic population density that is a direct result of their level of urbanization.

The second principal component (V_2) explained 33.21% of the variability in the original characteristics and possessed statistically significant correlations with the following characteristics: (a) support for Christian right-wing parties in 2005 ($r = 0.916$), (b) support for Christian right-wing parties in 2001 ($r = 0.890$), (c) support for Christian right-wing parties in 2007 ($r = 0.815$), (d) support for left-wing parties in 2001 ($r = -0.749$), (e) support for the Left and the Democrats coalition in 2007 ($r = -0.663$), (f) support for left-wing parties in 2005 ($r = -0.523$), and (g) support for pro-urban parties in 2001 ($r = 0.467$).

This component can be interpreted as the component of right-wing/left-wing parties (Fig. 4B). The lowest values of V_2 have been determined for the following dioceses: Sosnowiec (-3.10), Gniezno (-3.05), Koszalin-Kołobrzeg (-2.47). The above dioceses tend to support left-wing parties. The highest values of V_2 have been determined for the following dioceses: Kraków (4.16), Tarnów (4.11), Rzeszów (3.88), Gdańsk (3.23).

The regional distribution of the principal component V_2 (left-wing/right-wing nature of voters) is strongly associated with two characteristics that are direct measures of religiousness in Catholic dioceses: (a) percentage of *dominicanos* ($r = 0.634$), (b) percentage of *communicantes* ($r = 0.428$). It is negatively correlated with the number of faithful per priest ($r = -0.513$). This last number indicates that support for right-wing parties is stronger in dioceses with small parishes where the number of faithful per priest usually does not exceed 1,000, and hence, the number of parishioner-priest interactions is (can be) high. There are two exceptions to this rule: Diocese of Warsaw and Diocese of Warsaw-Praga. The two Catholic dioceses of the capital of Poland lean substantially to the right, but are otherwise different in terms of social and religious characteristics.

7. Conclusions

Religion continues to be one of the most important factors that help explain electoral behavior in Poland. The same is not true in certain other European countries such as Holland or the Czech Republic. Even in Poland, one does get the impression that the role of religion is becoming somewhat less important. The privatization of faith has its social consequences. It means that the influence of Christian values on public life and civil society will continue to decline. Catholics in Poland are generally out of ideas that would reverse this growing trend. Lay Catholic groups are usually weak and not present in public life and tend to have weak leaders. Such lay groups, much like the institutional Church itself, have a tough time finding common ground that would allow them to initiate dialog with individuals who hold extremely different views.

Today, most Poles look at a party's political platform when deciding which candidate to vote for. Only a small percentage of individuals pay attention to the religious views and practices of a given candidate.

The number of political parties and coalitions has steadily decreased since the first free elections in 1991. This may be a signal that the Polish political scene is consolidating. Over the last 25 years that Poland has functioned as a democratic state, the following parties have had a permanent impact on the political landscape of the country: SLD, PO, PiS, PSL. Some parties (Self Defense Party, LPR) were successful for a period of time and then proceeded to the margins of the Polish political scene.

The most important social divisions in Poland are those between the left-wing and the right-wing as well as between rural areas and main urban centers. The spatial distribution of political support for various parties changed substantially between 2001 and 2007. Poland can now be divided into two parts. The western part of the country tends to support left-wing and pro-urban parties, while the eastern part of the country tends to support candidates from right-wing and pro-rural parties. There are exceptions to this rule and they are associated with areas inhabited by various ethnic minorities: Kashubia, Opole Silesia, Upper Silesia, Podhale, and the Białystok Region.

The spatial distribution of election results in Poland is also influenced by historical factors described as "the legacy of the three partitions". It was a rather unusual event when in 2001, the SLD won elections across most of Poland, following four years of AWS rule. The 2007 spatial distribution of election results between the post-communist left and the post-Solidarity right is virtually identical to that of 1995, 1997, 2000, and 2001. This indicates that PO has inherited most of the post-communist electorate.

In Poland, the influence of religious factors on the election process is clear in a number of ways: (a) clear link between level of religiousness and voter turnout — the higher the level of religiousness, the more consistent the turnout over the years; (b) strong and steady support for right-wing parties in areas characterized by a high level of religiousness; and (c) steady support for left-wing parties in areas characterized by a low level of religiousness.

Note

- (1) Election committee – in Poland, the institution of election committees appeared in the Sejm Election Law of 1991. Election committees were established by individual parties (threshold of 5% nationally), a coalition party (threshold of 8%), social organizations and trade unions (threshold of 5%) and the Polish association of ethnic minorities (without requiring the threshold of 5%), in a single constituency, but the district entered several times in the diocese.

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